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# Executive Coaching: The Secret to Sustained Success

*Set up in 2007 by a group of former HR directors from a global automotive manufacturer, Protostar has weathered the economic crisis that saw so many smaller management consultancies fail.*

Our company didn't get off to an easy start. When we started up, the multibillion global executive coaching industry was unregulated and to many, was simply a staff development spin off and an easy second career for any manager who found themselves redundant. Since then, the industry has tried very hard to set up accreditation schemes through organisations such as the "Association For Coaching" who also drive academic research, in the same way as the medical professions. Clients, particularly the large international corporations, latched on to this and started to question the return on investment they were getting from coaching and for the first time demanded that coaches be accredited in some way.

As you can also imagine, setting up a business in 2007 was quite a daunting task. I remember being in discussion with a global petrochemical firm who at the time, were spending £1 million per year on coaching, but before the ink was dry on our contract, all coaching around the world was stopped, as they suddenly realised they had no idea what they were getting for this investment.

When the economic crisis hit, the global market for executive coaching crashed with it, but those of us who drove forward through that difficult period were able to highlight that challenging times are exactly when most value can be added by a coach. Managers are under pressure, they need to achieve more with less, they are often in crisis mode and typically they have no boss to talk to or their boss is no better able

to deal with it than they are. That's where an effective coach can really help to steer a manager through a difficult time and in turn help that organisation to come out the other side, stronger than before.

As such, we took the opportunity to design a 360-degree questionnaire, for which we won an innovation award, to help managers identify if they are displaying the right behaviours during a challenging period. It is this approach that has helped Protostar and the coaching industry to renew our importance, and prove that we are a cost effective solution for achieving higher levels of business performance.

In the aftermath of the recession, clients are quite understandably still cautious when it comes to coaching. However, this greater client awareness has helped to polarise the industry in to those who say they are a coach (they have a business card that says so) and those who have a proven track record of adding value. Fast forward to 2016 and we are consistently asked by clients for our accreditation and for testimonials, something that never used to happen.

Over the years, we have developed a strong reputation in diagnosing people issues within organisations, or behavioural issues with individual managers, and then providing solutions. Support can range from assisting with re-structuring an organisation, hiring in new talent or coaching the existing leaders and it's the executive coaching area that has particularly grown.

While there are no set requirements that make a 'great coach', intelligence and communication skills, and increasingly technology helps to make the coaching more effective. At Protostar, our coaches utilise a range of award winning online tools such as employee engagement surveys, 360 degree questionnaires and psychometrics, to better identify what the managers should be addressing.

Furthermore, our team all come from business management backgrounds and understand how companies may be in two minds about the concept of coaching. In our former roles, we all used to baulk at paying the fees of a typical consultancy firm, so we have deliberately kept our overheads very low in order to pass on those savings. We also made a conscious decision not to aim at one particular industry, because we tend to find that managers

